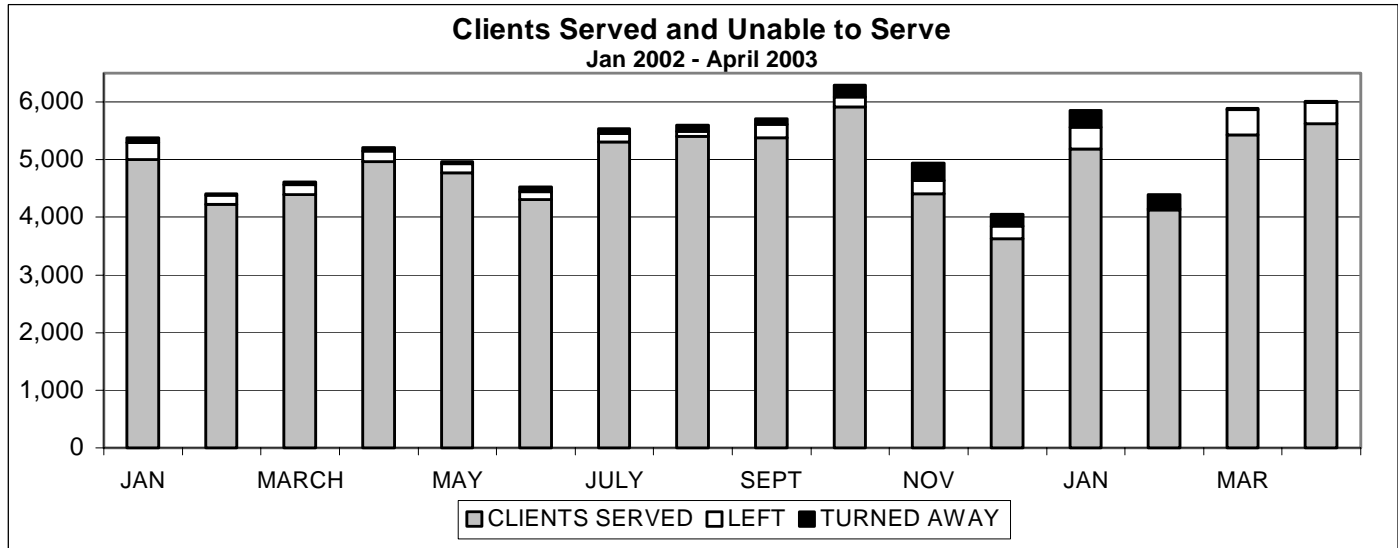


SOCIAL SERVICES-ADMINISTRATION

Outcome: Improving Access to Services and Customer Service

As the economy has weakened, the Department of Social Services has seen its “business” increase across the agency. The Food Stamp caseload is up 29% in the past two years and is projected to grow further in the next year. Work First cash assistance is projected to increase for the first time since 1996. Demand for Emergency Assistance continues to rise. Nearly 10% of Durham’s population receives its health care coverage through Medicaid or Health Choice for Children. Last year at this time, 51 children had entered our custody through foster care; this year, 103 have. The stories behind these numbers are many and varied, reflecting the layoffs and hiring freezes in the community.



Despite the dramatic increases in caseload, we have added no new staff in the past two years to address these needs. Increased demand for services impacts eligibility processing times. The Food Stamps QC Error Rate jumped from an excellent 2.55% to a dismal 22.56% in the past year. Staff retention is problematic because of the increasing workload and as staff leaves, the workload issues are exacerbated. We are also seeing increased turnover in Reception due to the workload and low pay.

The growing Latino community in Durham is creating an increased demand for services. Twenty-three percent (23%) of our Work First Child Only Cases are Latino; 16% of our Family and Children’s Medicaid cases are non-English speaking and 5% of our Food Stamp cases are non-English speaking. Title VI of the Federal Civil Rights Act requires that we provide services and non-compliance risks a lawsuit. Bilingual employees are difficult to recruit and retain due to high competition and low wages. Currently only 19 of our staff (4%) are bilingual/bicultural.

Records Management is in crisis. DSS has a paper-driven system for managing its 168,077+ records that are maintained in 935+ file cabinet drawers (187 five-drawer cabinets) holding the permanent records for just Food Stamps, Medicaid and Work First. These file cabinets fill more than three (3) full rooms taking up 1,036 square feet of valuable office space. Records are piled on top of file cabinets and the floor because of lack of space. Most *cannot be purged* because of the lifetime limit for TANF assistance. HIPPA regulations require secure records. Our paper driven system is not in compliance. Non-compliance places us at risk for denied or delayed reimbursements; PR issues/client confidence; and criminal penalties for agency and individual staff - up to \$25,000/violation (i.e. each record)/ year and prison time. In addition to our records in this work area, more file cabinets are filled with records from other programs. We are spending approximately \$50,000 per year to purchase new file folders and file cabinets to hold the growing files. For these reasons, we have requested \$500,000 for implementing an Imaging System. Because we generate indirect cost revenue from our many funding sources, the cost to the County will be \$250,000. Funding for this request has been included in the Manager’s Recommended FY2004 Budget.

Our outdated, inadequate facilities require constant repair and maintenance. Being in three buildings provides fragmented services, requiring families to travel from Main St., Duke St. and Chapel Hill Blvd.